Outgoing uni boss reveals one regret as he prepares to leave

UNISA's outgoing vice-chancellor says the state missed the chance to build a "very special" university when merger talks were abandoned.

Education Editor Sharyn Holderhead

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UNISA's outgoing vice-chancellor says the state missed the chance to build a "very special" university when merger talks between the institution and the University of Adelaide were abandoned.

Professor Peter Hoj, who leaves UniSA next Friday to take the reins at the University of Queensland, said he regretted not being able to oversee the move, which he said was "pretty close".

"I think that having two universities along the same street ... spends a disproportionate amount of funds on administration that could be put into good academic outcomes in teaching and learning and research," he said.

"It was pretty close. There were lots of very strong researchers at Adelaide who wanted it to happen."

Prof Hoj said there needed to be structural change in the state's three public universities. "I think if we don't get structural change we won't be able to take the next leap as a university city," he said. "I think it's hard, when you don't have critical size, to stay competitive."

Prof Hoj, who joined UniSA in 2007, led major improvements to infrastructure and development of a masterplan for the city campuses, which detailed plans to invest up to $1 billion in the next decade.

He also led the creation of a long-term strategic vision, Horizon 2020, which included plans to open a medical school. "I'm proud of the fact we're really helping to transform this end (the West End) of the city," Prof Hoj said.

He added: "We've built a lot of modern architecture.

"I'm really pleased our research reputation has grown a lot. We're now No. 2 for research income and No. 2 for research output.

"What we now need to do is have the staff qualification reflected even more in the research output. There is no doubt we need to have a culture that aspires (for) even more."